

LETTER
ON THE PRESENT
ASSOCIATIONS.

INTERSPERSED WITH VARIOUS
REMARKS,
HIGHLY INTERESTING;
PARTICULARLY AT THIS MOST
ALARMING CRISIS.

FROM AN OFFICER, TO A FRIEND IN THE COUNTRY.

Caveto! Fœnum habet in cornu.

Beware! There's danger stirring.

L O N D O N :

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LETTER
ON THE PRESENT
ASSOCIATIONS.

MY DEAR SIR,

YOU have desired me to give my opinion in regard to your entering your name into an Association, now forming for the purpose of supporting the Constitution, suppressing seditious Publications, &c. In doing this, I shall be led on to introduce some miscellaneous observations,

So long as your name does not appear among those avowedly associated for the purpose of propagating republican principles, and subverting the present Government, I shall not suppose you the less loyal for not enrolling yourself among the others: it strikes me as a

measure totally unnecessary. Every man who deports himself according to the laws, commits no act in violation of them, but voluntarily lives under their protection, is deemed virtually a good Citizen and Subject, without his signing a paper to declare he is so.

Indiscriminate Associations give a degree of consequence to those paltry, seditious Clubs, which they do not deserve—Besides, they have this bad effect; they tend to divide the people into a number of political sects. Some associate for the purpose of reform, others for avowed-republican views; some for the support of the Constitution, some for the suppression of seditious Publications, and others for the Liberty of the Press. But may not these very Meetings, professing themselves *constitutional in their views*, when they come to take root, and in fact to be more organized, in the end prove dangerous to that very Constitution they originally intended to support?—Why then all this?

The old way of addressing by county and municipal meetings seems the more eligible;
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but now the sense of the whole country is made known. Every person of the highest consideration, both as to rank and property, the merchants and traders, the yeomanry in the country, and the great mass of the people, have declared themselves, in the most satisfactory manner, strongly attached to the present Constitution, as consisting of *King, Lords, and Commons*. The number then of disaffected can be so very small, that it is associating to defend what is not in danger.

You are not to infer because a drunken scoundrel may have chalked upon a wall some seditious words, that the town is disaffected; no more than from seeing there obscene ones, you should suppose the inhabitants to be immoral. Whether the late alarm was occasioned by the intrigues of foreign emissaries, or some other cause, remains yet a secret. It has so far had this good effect, that it has brought forth such effusions of loyalty and attachment, as must please every one, and pacify the most timid.

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But let us beware of extremes. The prevailing cry of *Church and State* seems unconstitutional. There is a degree of bigotry in it, and an inadaptation to the present times. The different deviations from the forms of the Church are legalized by the Constitution : and the King, being the Head of the Church, and of course of all religious matters, the cry should be *King and Constitution*. In this all are included, and no odious distinctions created.

The example set by the French can never influence the minds of any nation : they have shewn themselves unworthy of liberty, and incapable of enjoying it. Their present Rulers, (for Government they have none) instead of acting as Legislators and Statesmen, have proved themselves Monsters and Assassins. Their proceedings have been marked with blood, oppression, and cruelty. Treacherous to themselves, and perfidious to the whole world, shall we imitate such a people ? Their own countryman, Voltaire, characterizes them as being either apes or tigers. To the disgrace of the European world, they
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are now the latter ; it is to be hoped they will ere long be again the former.

Their barbarous cruelty, and savage spite, seems doubly to be exercised against the person of their unfortunate Monarch, because he was undoubtedly the best man of their nation. Even the malignity of Paine's heart cannot prevent him from declaring the goodness of his character, the goodness of the man.

But hear what Mr. Neckar says :—" Be-
 " hold Louis the Sixteenth, who alone has
 " wished to plant *liberty* upon a foundation in-
 " dissoluble ; one who, surrounded by a faith-
 " ful army, and in the plenitude of his power,
 " has himself placed barriers to his authority ;
 " despising the prerogatives that he deemed
 " useless to the happiness of France, has volun-
 " tarily given them up. His reign has been
 " marked by numerous kindnesses of his love
 " for his people. Under his reign, and during
 " the time of his authority, (*les Corvées*) bind-
 " ing days work, that scourge of the country, have
 " been abolished, and converted into a duty
 " agreeable to the value of property. Under
 " his

“ his reign, *la Taille*, that arbitrary tax, has
 “ been fixed. Under his reign, the abolition of
 “ all personal servitude has been promoted, by
 “ the example which the King himself set in
 “ all his own domains.

“ This Prince, humane and compassionate,
 “ by abolishing all secret punishments, (those
 “ odious tortures, which forced an unhappy
 “ creature to become a witness against him-
 “ self) has disembarassed the criminal process
 “ of all its barbarities. ’Tis he who has paid
 “ attention to the improvement of the prisons
 “ and hospitals; ’tis he who has given the
 “ rare example of purity of morals; who is
 “ religious without being superstitious. In
 “ the midst of so many kindneſſes, public as
 “ well as private, who could ever accuse Louis
 “ of having once closed his heart against com-
 “ passion and pity?

“ Behold then, to-day, that ſame Monarch,
 “ after having experienced every kind of out-
 “ rage; after having undergone every indig-
 “ nity the moſt cutting; now barricaded up
 “ in a cloſe priſon. There it is, where ſepa-
 “ rated

“ rated from the world, he hourly learns the
 “ mouldering away of his fortune. There it
 “ is, where they will one day go to summon
 “ him to appear before a Tribunal prejudiced
 “ against him; before a Tribunal whose autho-
 “ rity does not exist, and does not possess one
 “ generous sentiment; and without a preli-
 “ minary act of confidence on the part of that
 “ King, whom they themselves have styled
 “ *The Restorer of French Liberty.*”

Behold this much injured Sovereign, sub-
 jected to be tried like a common culprit, by
 those ruffians who have been searching for
 the crimes of their Kings for fourteen cen-
 turies past, in order to hurl them upon his in-
 nocent, devoted head. Every honest heart in
 this country must bleed for him.

The contemplation of these atrocities would
 lead one into too great length: let us return
 home, where the prospect is more pleasing.

In this country, thank God, there is not
 only a stock of common sense, but a large
 fund of good sense. By this we are enabled

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to behold the power of the *King, the Lords, and Commons*, without jealousy, either in their collective or separate branches; knowing that each has reciprocal duties and reciprocal checks: that although their power was originally delegated from the people, yet it is again reflected back to them, by the promulgation of wholesome laws, which give protection to their *lives, liberties, and properties*.

Under this idea, I can look at the King seated upon his Throne, surrounded by all his great Officers of State, with all the ensigns and pageantry of power, and all the grandeur of Imperial Sovereignty displayed. I can contemplate upon this shew with the most pleasing sensations; conscious that, in no one instance, his Majesty can commit an act of injustice, although on many he may confer innumerable benefits. Here then the honest heart may feel gratification, and take pride to itself, in seeing the Sovereignty and Majesty of the People, which can only remain vague and ideal, till thus collected, as it were, into one focus, and so rendered efficient and permanent.

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The keeping up, on occasions, of splendid and kingly state, is highly decorous, and a proper compliment from the executive to the delegating power. So are the occasional condescensions of the Sovereign, in conversing with his subjects without the shackles of ceremony: it is flattering to the party honoured, and leaves a favourable impression of the goodness of his heart. It is impossible for any Sovereign to reign more in the hearts of his people than our present King: the zealous declarations of attachment to him and his illustrious family have been unprecedented. Nor are expressions of loyalty sent to him in his collective capacity alone, but those of love to him as a man.

Our aristocracy has been wisely formed; although hereditary, yet it is not a monopoly; it springs originally out of the people, and is still recruited from it. The road to Fame and Honours is open to every one: Virtue, Courage, and Learning, will lead the way. Our Nobles have exclusive privileges, only as Peers of Parliament, they have no exclusive rights;—but every man has an equal right to the protection

of the laws. To consider great wealth as a necessary step to the Peerage, is wrong; the man is wholly the object to be considered: and although a certain estate is necessary for enabling him to support his rank with dignity, it is by no means necessary that that estate should be an overgrown one. In the exaltation then of a Commoner to the Peerage, it cannot be a matter of envy to any one: if we wish for those honours, let us emulate to deserve them.

The Commons, constituted immediately by the People, form the grand part of this Constitution; and in their legislative capacity, are so connected with the other two, still remaining separate as to their rights and privileges, that from all together a machine is formed, although apparently compleat, yet remaining simple, easily to be kept in order, and containing within itself such principles of reparation, that nothing but the grossest neglect can suffer it to fall to decay.

Your zeal in stepping forward under the idea of its being in danger, I cannot but commend.

commend. No apprehension could arise, except from the French. Among the many unhappy emigrants from that devoted country, doubtless there are many good characters, and who are much to be pitied: but I fear there are a great number of the vilest miscreants, of base assassins, plunderers, and robbers; whose hands are still reeking with the innocent blood of those victims whom they lately sacrificed to their savage fury.

A decree of banishment is now preparing in the National Convention, to be denounced against the *ci-devant* Duke of Orleans. I cannot forbear transcribing a paragraph from a Morning Paper, which describes him so exactly,

“ Now comes the turn of the infamous
 “ Egalité; who, in October 1789, not having
 “ the audacity to usurp the Throne, over-
 “ turned it by his Agents. He too is now
 “ condemned to disappear under the ruins of
 “ that very Throne, which his sacrilegious
 “ hands have shaken.—Whither shall he fly
 “ for refuge? What nation will afford an asy-
 “ lum

"luna to this monster of vice? What people
 "will endure this illustrious villain, whose
 "licentious and criminal life presents nothing
 "but shameless vices, dreadful treasons, low-
 "lived intrigues; without one virtue, one
 "good quality, one mental faculty, to coun-
 "terpoise the least of his crimes?"

The country that is to endure him, surely
 will not be England. Should his shameless
 audacity point out this country to him as a
 retreat, it is to be hoped that he will be held
 in universal detestation, and that his Royal
 Highness the *Prince of Wales* will be the first
 to set the example, by instantly withdrawing
 from him that countenance which he formerly
 honoured him with.

It is impossible to mention his Royal High-
 ness, on any occasion, without the greatest
 respect; and I must apologize for having taken
 the liberty of suggesting any thing to one who
 is so competent a judge of what is dignified
 and decorous; who as a *Prince* highly en-
 dowed, is respected; as a *Gentleman* highly
 accom-

accomplished, admired; and as a *Man* highly
beneficent, esteemed.

I have been led to touch just slightly upon
the foregoing subjects, merely to shew that
apparently there is no danger, either existing
or latent. The executive power has certainly
the authority to enforce the laws; and if it
has it not sufficiently, let us give it the means,
without creating an artificial assistant one,
which is unknown to the Constitution, and
may ultimately prove its ruin.

In Ireland at this moment the people are
invited, under the most plausible pretexts of
supporting the Constitution of their country,
to associate with arms in their hands; and
they are then told, in all the affected phrase-
ology of French jacobinism, that they have
innumerable grievances to redress, and that
they must not separate till they have effected
that purpose. Is there no danger in such
Association? Here the whole is avowed, and
may be guarded against.—Do not confound
this armed Association with the Meetings of
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the petitioning Catholics of Ireland: they are not at all connected: their demands appear to be founded on justice and moderation. It would be improper and indelicate to enter on the subject, as their Delegates are already arrived to arrange matters with Administration. But in these our Associations, the first principles being apparently good, the ultimate danger is concealed, or not considered.

We will suppose your Associations all organized, professing and tendering assistance to the Magistrates, passing their approbation upon the laws and proceedings of Parliament; here then spring up so many Assemblies, criticising on the legislation of the country; these from applauding will come to disapprove; the Magistrates, in such cases, will be led to be supine, because they have not the declared assistance of the Associators. The Associators in the country, finding their distance from the capital debars them of the advantages of immediate deliberation, beg to send Deputies; the whole then that is wanting is, to procure a room large enough for their reception, and a kind
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of Jacobin Club is constituted, without having been originally intended. Where then would be the difference, whether this mongrel Assembly should possess power in the Constitution, or influence on it?

Parochial Meetings are now establishing themselves all over the kingdom; nay, every village must have its Association, to give its imaginary aid to the Country Justice; nor is the rage likely to cease, till we are become a nation of inquisitorial Spies and acting Constables. Each parish will be an assemblage of petty Police Officers.

Professions of loyalty and support of the Constitution, in whatever manner made known, are commendable: but when these Meetings declare that they will vigorously suppress such or such Assemblies, such Publications, prevent such or such Speeches from being delivered; do not they arrogate to themselves an authority which they are not entitled to by law? and by their attempt to suppress such Publications as the law may not have decided upon, do they

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not unwarrantably pass a prejudgment upon the Publisher?

The greater part, I am convinced, are associated from the best and purest intentions; but unforeseen difficulties will arise: instead of unanimity, a political kind of warfare will be kept up, counter Associations form, and those not expressing the mildest intentions:—witness the recent one at Derby. In point of domestic comfort, Neighbour Thomas becomes a Spy upon Neighbour John, and so *vice versa*; good fellowship, and mutual confidence, are at length destroyed; society loses its cheerfulness; conversation is clogged; opinions not delivered, or given through the medium of metaphorical disguise. The entrance of an Associator into any Assembly here, may have something like such an effect, as the sudden appearance of an Alguazil, or an Officer of the Holy Inquisition, would have in Spain.

Self-constituted Societies, arrogating to themselves authority, must ever be odious: they may become mischievous, but never useful.

ful. In the best Governments, the madness of the multitude may occasionally break out in scenes of riot ; and frequently for the most trivial cause : in such cases, should the remonstrances of the civil power prove inefficacious, most probably both the remonstrance and assistance of the Associators, would prove equally so. For allaying such paroxysms of phrensy, Government will act wise by depending upon a much more efficient force. The point then seems to rest here. If the civil power be found inadequate to the enforcing the Laws, suppressing seditious Publications, Meetings, &c. so as to have recourse to these Associations for assistance ; they will become, by a sort of courtesy, tolerated, although not legitimated. By thus having interwoven themselves into the Government of the country, they may not only become embarrassing to its measures, but dangerous to its very principles. If the civil power be sufficiently strong, where then the object of associating ? It is supererogatory, and unnecessary ; besides, it is a tacit reflexion upon it.

I have before observed, that unthought of danger may lay concealed, and that this interference may prove an excrescence so unwieldy to the Constitution, that *reform* will here indeed be necessary. Let then the Civil Magistrate (whose powers are well defined, and sufficiently ample; if he has abilities, courage, and inclination to put them in force) step boldly forward and exert himself when occasion may require, he will then find not the least necessity for demanding the concurrent assistance of his associated neighbours.

I know not whether this may strike you in so forcible a manner; if my fears be ideal, so much the better. From the best of motives, I have given you my opinion upon this interesting subject; not from the smallest idea of throwing the least odium upon what I am sure is well intentioned. You know too well my inviolable attachment to the Constitution: it is from a prepossession that it can receive no ultimate advantage from these measures, that I have been induced to reply to your request so fully.

In

In regard to myself, I am a member of no Association nor political Club whatever: as a military man, I made an early tender of my services to Government, which both duty and inclination prompted me to do.

• By no means let me bias you to adopt sentiments, which I shall not press you to follow, or blame you for rejecting.

I am, &c.

Jan. 5, 1793.

[1]

In regard to myself, I am a member of no
association, not political, and whatever I do
is for my own benefit, and in the order of my
life, as to government, which both day and
night I am occupied in to do.

By no means for me, but you to adopt their
means, which I shall not press you to follow,
or think you for rejecting.

I am, Sir,



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